

iCommons Summit

Saturday, June 25 — Harvard Law School Campus

After wandering around stupidly for about an hour, I see a crowd of people outside the one door I didn't bother trying to open (all the others were locked). Yep, they're definitely Creative Commons people. There's Hal Abelson, who seems not to recognize me. And there's Mike who says hi but then gets pulled away. I push inside and get a bottle of water. And there's Larry Lessig! 'Wow, you look like you've lost a million pounds,' Larry says. 'Is that true?' 'No, I don't think I've lost a *million* pounds,' I reply.

I didn't think that the way I looked would change much. I would always be the little kid in the corner, the guy who definitely stands out. But then I was looking at some old photos of me receiving the ArsDigita prize and I realize I really do look rather different. Then I was ugly, short, fat, awkward, and poorly-dressed. Now I'm taller and definitely much thinner (although that seems to change), I wear better-looking clothes, and my face has become rather handsome-looking, especially on the occasions when I shave it. Now when I meet people they don't recognize me — they wait until I introduce myself or sort of stare at me blankly before they realize who I am — that never used to happen before.

Anyway, I'm here to check out the iCommons summit. Creative Commons has grown from a couple former students of Larry's to a large international "movement" (as all the speakers insist on calling it), the most prominent members of which have been flown out to Harvard from around the world thanks to Soros's foundation. Charlie Nesson gives the day's closing keynote, describing his vision of an indestructible world library.

We then retire to Charlie Nesson's house, which is the typical sort of cocktail party-type affair. When I'm not looking, Lessig gets pushed into Nesson's pool. 'I believe this is the only area where it is appropriate to say this,' says one legally-trained guest, 'but he was asking for it.'

When I tell him that I'm out here to start a company, a descendent of Robert Boyle (of Boyle's law) offers to invest. 'But we don't have anything,' I insist. 'That's OK,' he says, 'I'm sure you'll succeed at some point.'

I spend most of the night talking to Mike Linksvayer, who I end up walking back with, and we end up talking for hours outside the subway stop, long into the night, long after the subway has stopped running, so I buy a box of Cheerios and a bottle of water from a 7-11 and walk the way back to my dorm room, listening to radical radio shows podcast onto my iPod.

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The phone rings. It's my father. 'Hi, I'm here,' he says. 'Oh. I forgot you were coming. I was just going to see Lessig give a closing keynote.' I agree to meet him on the way there and halfway between my dorm and his hotel, there he is, smiling widely. My dad and I have not really spoken in person since almost a year ago, when he used force and trickery to prevent me from going to FOO Camp in a stupid show of power. He's much nicer now. I think he misses me.

As we walk and talk a kid in front of us keeps looking behind at me. At first I think it's something I've said, but he keeps doing it. Finally he stops and says, 'Hey, you're that weblogger guy, right?' 'Yeah,' I say. 'Aaron something. Yeah, I read your site.' 'Wow,' I say. 'Yeah, I'm here for the Linguistics summer school. Maybe I'll see you around some time.' 'Maybe,' I say hopefully.

I ask if my Dad wants to come with to Lessig's keynote and he agrees.

I get to chat a bit with Ben Adida who, having been left with my legacy of using RDF for Creative Commons found himself chair of the RDF-in-HTML task force (quite possibly the worst job in the W3C — I should ask him how he did it sometime) and, now discovering that overnight a major competitor (Microformats, pushed by Technorati) has arisen, is trying to get them to convert. I've been friends with the Technorati guys and I take their position, telling Ben that it's a hopeless endeavor. Ben is a little shocked at this — I was the one who got him on the RDF train after all — and pushes back. And eventually he manages to convince me that it wouldn't require hardly any additional work from the Microformats guys to be RDF/A-compatible.

Joi Ito waves from behind Ben.

After Lessig's speech, we head off and find dinner.

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July 26, 2005